

High Energy Cost Grant Program

Environmental Report

Overview

The USDA Rural Utilities Service (RUS) is required to assess the potential impacts of proposed federal actions and undertakings, including the provision of financial assistance through the High Energy Cost Grant Program, to the human environment in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and other federal, state, and local environmental laws. RUS requires awardees of the HECG program to complete this Environmental Report in order to ensure compliance with Council on Environmental Quality's implementing regulations for NEPA, 40 CFR Part 1500, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations for Section 106 of NHPA, 36 CFR Part 800, and other applicable laws. The Environmental Report provides the requisite information for RUS Environmental Staff to either complete the environmental review process or determine the appropriate level of additional impact analysis, in accordance with RUS Environmental Policies and Procedures, 7 CFR Part 1794 (<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/pdf/1794.pdf>). If additional impact analyses beyond the submittal of an Environmental Report are required, awardees will be notified by RUS Environmental Staff.

Until RUS has concluded the environmental review process, awardees are prohibited from taking actions that may have an adverse environmental impact or limit the choice of alternatives being considered in accordance with 7 CFR § 1794.15. If the proposed grant project involves construction activities or property acquisition, the applicant is generally prohibited from acquiring, rehabilitating, converting, leasing, repairing or constructing property or facilities, or committing or expending Agency or non-Agency funds.

Please note, the applicant may submit a copy of any environmental review document that has been prepared in connection with obtaining permits, approvals, or other financing for the proposed project from State, local or other federal agencies. Such material, to the extent relevant, may be used to meet the requirements herein. Also, applicants shall not reference items provided in other parts of the application package; all materials relevant to this report must be integrated herein to facilitate timely review.

Requested Information

- A. Project Description and Location:** Provide a concise description of all project related activities. Complete descriptions and locations must be provided for each site affected by project-related construction activities.
- B. Map:** Include a map for each site affected by construction. RUS recommends U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute quadrangle maps at a map scale of 1:24,000; larger scale maps may be provided for site-specific proposals, which may be obtained and purchased at the following website (<http://www.usgs.gov/pubprod/maps.html>). All project elements, if known at the time of application, must be clearly depicted on any map provided. If appropriate, photographs or aerial photographs of site-specific proposals may be provided.
- C. Property Changes:** Describe the amount of property to be cleared, excavated, fenced, or otherwise disturbed by the project, and the current land use and zoning for each project site affected by construction. Document whether the proposed project is located on public land owned or managed by the federal government. For information related to federal lands see the following website (<http://www.geocommunicator.gov>). This website provides cadastral survey and land management information and data from the National Integrated Land System specifically the distribution of the Public Land Survey System (PLSS), other survey-based data, and federal land boundaries.

- D. Buildings:** Describe buildings or other structures, including dimensions, to be constructed or modified. For linear projects, state whether the project is to be located on or within previously disturbed public rights-of-way.
- E. Wetlands:** Describe and indicate whether wetlands are present on or near the project site(s) affected by construction (maps of wetlands may be obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wetland Inventory website (<http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/>), or from soil maps obtained from the USDA, Natural Resource Conservation Service's website (<http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/HomePage.htm>).
- F. Threatened and Endangered Species:** Describe and indicate whether any project site(s) will directly or indirectly affect any threatened, endangered or candidate species or is within or near critical habitats. Applicants must provide species lists and appropriate species accounts (i.e. requisite habitat) obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's website (http://ecos.fws.gov/tess_public/) for each county affected by construction of the project.
- G. Floodplains:** Describe and indicate whether or not any facility(ies) or site(s) are located within an 100-year floodplain. If any project-related construction activities are within floodplains, a copy of a Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) that depicts construction activities must be included. Information related to floodplains and National Flood Insurance Maps may be obtained from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) website (<http://msc.fema.gov/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/FemaWelcomeView?storeId=10001&catalogId=10001&langId=-1>).
- H. Historic Properties:** Describe any cultural resources, including historic properties (i.e. properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places), located in or within a one-mile radius of the project area and how they may be impacted by the project. Information related to historic properties can be obtained from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in your respective State. The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers Website (<http://www.ncshpo.org/find/index.htm>) provides a directory of SHPOs.

Applicants must gather information about the nature and location of historic properties from the SHPO, and subsequently submit this information, including correspondence, to RUS. SHPOs should be asked the following questions:

1. Is the proposed project located on, within or adjacent to any properties listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places? Is the proposed project located on, within or adjacent to a National Historic Landmark? If the answer is yes, describe and indicate the geographic relationship between the project and property with maps.
2. Will the proposed project impact, use or alter a building or structure that was constructed more than 50 years ago? If so, describe the building/structure with a statement of its condition, including photographs, and document its age.

Applicants must also indicate if any portion of the project is located on tribal lands, meaning lands within the exterior boundaries of any Indian reservation and all dependent Indian communities. Information regarding historic properties located on tribal lands may be obtained from the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) or the tribe's official representative for historic preservation. If identified, applicants should provide any information gathered about historic properties on tribal lands, including any correspondence with an Indian tribe, to RUS.

- I. Coastal Areas:** Determine whether or not the project is within the boundaries of a coastal zone management area (CZMA). For boundary related and contact information related to CZMA, see National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management's website (<http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/consistency/welcome.html>).
- J. Brownfields:** Determine whether the project is located within a brownfield site. Per 42 U.S.C. 9601, the term "brownfield site" means real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. Maps and locations of sites, facilities and properties that have been contaminated by hazardous materials and are being, or have been, cleaned up under EPA's

Superfund, RCRA and/or brownfields cleanup programs can be found at the EPA's Cleanups in My Community website (<http://iaspub.epa.gov/Cleanups/>).

Additional Assistance/Contact Information

In addition to the resource specific references provided above, general NEPA related information and guidance can be found on both the CEQ website (<http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/index.html>) and the EPA website (<http://www.epa.gov/compliance/basics/nepa.html>). For information related to NHPA, see the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation website - <http://www.achp.gov/docs/CitizenGuide.pdf>.

Please direct any questions regarding the environmental review process to Emily Orler, Environmental Protection Specialist, who may be reached by phone at 202-720-1414, or by email at emily.orler@wdc.usda.gov.